



*An introduction to*

# Bexhill-on-Sea



GEOFF HUTCHINSON

*'One of the greenest and sweetest spots on this island'*

*Cover picture: The Colonnade*

AN INTRODUCTION TO  
**Bexhill-on-Sea**

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AN INTRODUCTION TO HASTINGS & ST LEONARDS

# INTRODUCTION

I hope this brief introduction and outline of the history of Bexhill-on-Sea will be useful and informative for the visitor to the town.

Situated on the peaceful, scenic south coast, Bexhill nestles in a bay between the larger towns of Eastbourne and Hastings, yet is less than two hours from London and 75 minutes from the port of Dover.

Although well able to provide the holidaymaker with the usual seaside fare, Bexhill lacks the blatant commercialism found in some resorts. It retains a quiet dignity which has made it popular since the late 19th century, and its description in 1924 as 'one of the greenest and sweetest spots on this island' is still true today. It is a pleasant place to be.

Unlike many seaside resorts, Bexhill does not 'shut up shop' in the winter months. The temperate southern climate makes it an ideal place at any time of the year.

Viewed by many as a modern town with little historic interest, Bexhill holds many surprises. The Old Town is obviously the historical jewel in the crown but the way the modern resort has developed from the initial patronage of the De La Warr family in the late 19th century, is a fascinating episode in modern history.

I would not presume this booklet to be a complete guide to the town, or indeed, a comprehensive history, but hopefully the main points of interest and places to see, historical or otherwise, are covered.

For a work of this size, descriptions must, of necessity, be brief, but should the reader require further information, there are several fine publications available on all aspects of the town and its environs. The Tourist Information Office, situated at the De La Warr Pavilion, is also on hand to provide more details.

If you are a visitor to the town, enjoy your stay.

Geoff Hutchinson, 1989

## *Acknowledgements*

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# ORIGINS AND HISTORY

After the withdrawal of the Roman legions from these shores in the 5th century and the fall of their great fortress at Pevensey, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes of northern Europe were soon to populate the southern part of this country.

These Anglo Saxons were eventually to be conquered by King Offa II of Mercia, who in the year 772, made a grant of 8 hides (approximately 500 acres) to the venerable Bishop Oswald of Selsey, with instructions to build and endow a church to the praise of God, at the existing manor of Bixlea. The declaration was dated the 15th August 772 and this is the first recorded reference in Bexhill's history.

The Church of St Peter still stands on the hill, half a mile from the sea, in the area known today as the Old Town. A Saxon village grew up around the church and the manor was later transferred to the see of Chichester in 1057.

Following the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the small community was devastated by the Normans. William the Conqueror took the lands from the church and included it in the Rape of Hastings, which he later granted to Robert, Second Count of Eu, as reward for his endeavours in battle.

In the Domesday Book the village was named as Bexelei and through the years has been known as Bixlea, Bexle, Becksley and Bixle. It was only from the 15th century onwards that the name was shown as Bexhill.

In 1148 the church lands were finally restored to the see of Chichester, which held them until 1561 when the manor of Bexhill was acquired by the Crown and during the late 16th century was granted by Elizabeth I to Baron Buckhurst, the 1st Earl of Dorset, Thomas Sackville.

The first church registers of St Peter's were started in 1558 and these were followed later by more comprehensive parish records.

For nearly 200 years little of significance occurred within the small village until the natural disaster of the severe storms of 1729.

At the beginning of the 18th century Bexhill was still just a small village consisting of a few houses and the village inn grouped around St Peter's Church. The narrow Sea Lane, now Sea Road, led down to the sea across marshy uncultivated land to the south. At times this land was covered by the sea. To the north was the hamlet of Sidley, and to the west, Little Common, both surrounded by farmland.

In 1804 the town came to prominence with the building of an infantry depot and parade ground for the soldiers of the King's German Legion, serving in the Napoleonic wars. Over 5000 troops were garrisoned at Bexhill, and 12 defensive Martello Towers were erected along the sea shore. The effect this added population had on a small village of 500 people was obviously considerable.

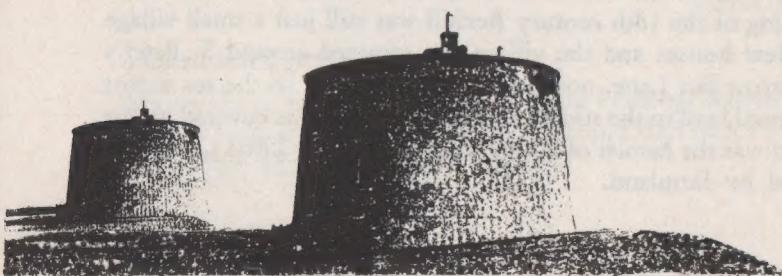
After the Napoleonic Wars and the withdrawal of troops, Bexhill tried to return to its previously normal routine but it never fully reverted to the isolated village of earlier times. Bexhill had been 'put on the map'.

In the wake of the military, visitors of note soon began to appreciate the attractions and advantages of the Sussex countryside and Bexhill's reputation as a pleasant, invigorating place, was established.

The year 1813 saw the coming together of two great families which formed the basis of Bexhill society life for many years to follow — the marriage of Elizabeth Sackville to the 5th Earl of De La Warr. The Bexhill and Buckhurst estates now passed into the De La Warr family. In this year a Bexhill property was advertised for sale in a London newspaper, and the town was extolled for its agreeable climate and position. The population was now 1600.

During the mid 19th century one of the most important factors to influence the expansion of the town was the coming of the railway. The Lewes to Bulverhythe line, run by the London, Brighton and South Coast Company, was opened in 1846 with a station at Bexhill. However, the railway ran to the south of the village and Bexhill was still isolated at the top of the hill, but development gradually began to spread to meet the railway line.

Early royal visitors to Bexhill were Princess Victoria and her mother, who were staying at nearby Hastings in 1864, and The Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) also the same year.



As late as 1870 Bexhill was still described as a picturesque village. Between Bexhill and St Leonards to the east there were no more than a dozen houses, but by 1873 the expansion had gained pace and the population of Bexhill had grown to 2000 with 450 houses.

In the early 1880s, Samuel Scrivens, then the second largest landowner in Bexhill, disposed of farmland west of the Old Town for development and the De La Warr family, suffering a slump in their agricultural interests, decided to invest their money into the development of Bexhill as a fashionable seaside resort.

In 1883 the 7th Earl De La Warr commissioned the London builder, John Webb, to construct an eastern sea wall and parade. In part payment for this work, Webb had accepted land south of the railway, which he soon began to develop.

The 7th Earl instigated the laying out of further parades and gardens and promoted the introduction of gas and water companies. He added the words 'on-Sea' to the town in 1884. Bexhill was at this time governed by a local board, consisting of nine members. Constituted on May 7th, 1884 by an order of the Local Government Board, and given the title The Local Board of Bexhill, it was formed because of Bexhill's anticipated rapid growth and the inability of the previous governing body, The Battle Union Board of Guardians to adequately provide for the growing needs of the town. This marked the beginning of modern local government in Bexhill.

The 8th Earl, continued his father's work and the furtherance of high-class Victorian and Edwardian development during the 1890s was almost entirely due to him. Quality hotels were built and the town hall was opened by the Mayor of London in 1895. The town also began its development across the farmlands towards neighbouring Sidley.

In 1894, the local board of government was superseded by an Urban District Council and in 1902, on the coronation of Edward VII, Bexhill received its Charter of Incorporation as a municipal borough.

The Bexhill West to Crowhurst branch railway opened, linking Bexhill to the Hastings to Charing Cross line and provided fast trains to London. The commercial centre of the town was now south of the railway line and the population in 1902 had grown to 13,000.

It was also in 1902 that Bexhill first saw the motor car. The town became the venue for the first motor car event in the country.

Another factor which brought Bexhill to prominence was the influx of independent boarding schools which opened in the town. Once there were over 50 such premises within its boundaries. The unique deep platforms of

Bexhill railway station were constructed specifically to accommodate the large number of children and their luggage at the start and finish of their school terms.

On a frivolous note, Bexhill was the first resort in the country to allow mixed bathing in 1901!

Further seaside development was completed in the early years of the 20th century and the impressive Colonnade was opened in 1911.

The famous De La Warr Pavilion was opened as the town's premier entertainment centre in 1935.

Bexhill was affected by the two world wars. During the second world war the town was subjected to 51 air raids by German bombers and many of the town centre buildings were damaged.

Since the war, Bexhill has further enhanced its reputation as a holiday resort, managing to keep the balance as an increasingly popular retirement place, yet still providing the facilities required by the modern holidaymaker. Through the years the town has fully expanded to the areas of Sidley in the north and Cooden and Little Common in the west and the population now stands at over 35,000.

The first official visit to the town by a reigning monarch was by Queen Elizabeth II, accompanied by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, in 1966.

In 1974, after nearly 72 years of civic independence, Bexhill ceased to exist as a borough, when Rother District Council was formed. The town is now the administrative centre for this body.



# THE OLD TOWN

At the northern end of Upper Sea Road, sitting on a hilltop overlooking the modern town is the fascinating Old Town of Bexhill. It is an area which retains many reminders of Bexhill's past and until the middle of the 19th century was the extent of the town. The only way to fully appreciate the charm of this historic place is on foot.

St Peter's Church has been a centre of worship for over 1200 years but there is very little of the original Saxon church remaining today. After the Norman Conquest the church was enlarged and other alterations have been carried out through the years. In the south side of the tower is the famous eighth century 'Bexhill Stone', evidence of the town's Saxon origins, and the 13th century stone, believed to be the tombstone of a crusader. Both were discovered when restoration work was undertaken in 1878.

At the entrance to the beautiful churchyard stands a fine lychgate, built in 1906 and a sundial, which was once part of the church.

There are many interesting features in and around St Peter's and it is certainly worth a long visit.

On the opposite side of Church Street stand the picturesque cottages named The Saltbox and Rimswell Cottage, believed to date from the 17th century. Next to them is an attractive terrace of whiteboard cottages of the Georgian period.

The beautifully preserved 15th century Wealden House, stands next to the church lychgates. The original building consisted of two houses which were later joined together and there is an attractive firemark on the front. The building is now a restaurant.

At the end of Church Street is the Bell Hotel. Originally an old coaching inn, it served travellers along the ancient coastal road from Dover in Kent to Honiton in Devon. Nearby Hastings Road, now a cul-de-sac, was formerly part of this road and there are several interesting Georgian and Victorian properties in this area.

The Bell Hotel was for many years the meeting place of the local community and its assembly room was sometimes used as a theatre. It was modernised in 1888 and was the only place in Bexhill to offer accommodation, before the building of the Castle and Devonshire Hotels.

The Antiques Centre with its belfry on the roof, holds a huge clock,

erected in 1887 in celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The original building which housed the timepiece was destroyed by fire in 1908 but the clock was able to be renovated. The sound of chiming was silenced in 1969 after residents complained that it was keeping them awake at night.

At the start of De La Warr Road a giant walnut tree once stood, close to the traffic bollards we see today. It had stood there for over 400 years and was finally removed in 1921. The village stocks also once stood in this area. A gavel made from the walnut tree was used at the laying of the commemorative stone at the opening of the Town Hall extension in 1908 and is still kept among the town's civic possessions.



Nearby are the remains of the Manor House, the oldest structure in the town after St Peter's Church. A house stood there for 900 years.

The Manor House was rebuilt by Sir Richard de Wycke during the 13th century and during the reign of Elizabeth I in 1570 was granted to Thomas Sackville, the first Earl of Dorset and Baron Buckhurst.

In 1813 the 5th Earl De La Warr married Elizabeth Sackville and eventually the estates passed into the De La Warr family.

The Manor House had a chequered history and at the end of the 19th century was considered to be in poor repair. However, earlier it had been the focal point of local society life. The outbuildings were altered in accordance with the style of the building and the cattle shed became the pavilion known as The Barn, which still survives today. In the 1890s the lower part of the estate, now Manor and Magdalene Roads, was a cricket ground. The Australian Test team played there in 1896.

The Manor estate was eventually bought by Bexhill Corporation in 1963 for £22,000 and sadly, despite much controversy, the house and some of the outbuildings, including the South Lodge, which overlooked High Street, were demolished to widen the road. This left only the ancient portions of the house to form the centre of what is now The Manor Gardens, a peaceful ornamental public space. There is a formal rose garden, aviary, walled garden and lily pond and the gardens are sometimes the venue for open-air productions of Shakespeare.

In the ruins can be seen a 14th century window while in the Tudor section are the remains of a lounge and its stone fireplace. There is also a fine example of wrought ironwork which commemorates King Offa's Charter of 772.

The surviving Manor Barn is used regularly for functions and the old stables building houses the popular Museum of Costume and Social History. Displays of dolls and toys dating back many generations can be seen as well as sewing machines and household effects of a bygone era, many of which are still in working order. There are also costumes dating from 1740 to 1960. Parking is free, there are guided tours and the museum is open from Easter to October.

The magnificent Coach House was built about 1886. The coachman's cottage was at the eastern end and the living quarters for other estate servants were on the first and second floors.

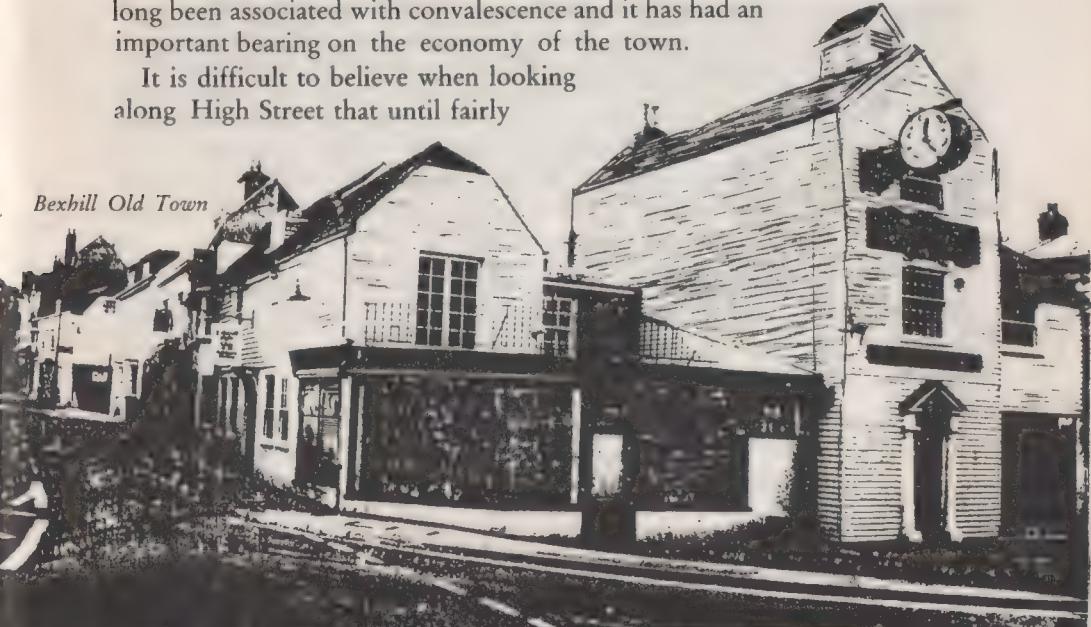
The forge which gave the name to Forge House was demolished soon after the second world war. Forge House was originally several cottages with the blacksmith living at one end.

The house named The Grange was formerly called Brook House and was the home of A S Brook, the Earl's bailiff, who kept the pack of hounds known as the Bexhill Harriers.

The area opposite The Grange was once the site of The Metropolitan Convalescent Institution, the first of Bexhill's many convalescent homes, opened in 1881. The impressive building was demolished in 1989 to make way for modern development. Due to its climate and situation Bexhill has long been associated with convalescence and it has had an important bearing on the economy of the town.

It is difficult to believe when looking along High Street that until fairly

Bexhill Old Town



recently this road bore the brunt of most of Bexhill's through traffic before the Old Town was bypassed by King Offa Way in the 1970s.

High Street is a delightful mixture of Georgian and Victorian architecture, with some of the properties dating back even further. Hanover House was built in 1806 and was the home of an officer of the King's German Legion stationed at Bexhill during the Napoleonic Wars.

Linkwell is a fine late Regency house, a section of which was part of a mill complex in the 17th century.

Pococks, the butchers, commenced trading in 1801 and once the slaughterhouse stood at the rear. During the Napoleonic Wars, the Bexhill barracks were the butcher's biggest customer.

The Little Beehive Cottage was once the chemist shop and Chantry Cottage was for many years the home of the Girl Guide Officer to the 1st Buckingham Palace Group of which the Queen, then Princess Elizabeth, and Princess Margaret were members.

Barrack Hall once formed part of the Bexhill Barracks for the King's German Legion Infantry. The Duke of Wellington is reputed to have stayed there.

It was in 1804 that an infantry depot of the Hanoverian King's Legion was formed at Bexhill when several thousand troops were quartered into the town. The Legion originated from the disbandment of the army of the Elector of Hanover, King George III of England when the troops were offered recruitment as a separate force within the British Army. The army camp covered 25 acres and the parade ground ran parallel to Belle Hill.

At first the local population viewed the soldiers with suspicion, but soon they became accepted into the local community. When the wars were over many returned to their native Germany, but some stayed to marry local women. The Legion's commanding officer, Lt-Gen Sir Charles von Alten is the only German officer to have led a British infantry division. In the city of Hanover a house, once occupied by Colonel Halkett of the King's Legion, has a plaque attached which commemorates him as one of 'the valiant combatants of the old royal German Legion'.

Belle Hill was originally known as Belly Hill and is crammed with properties of historical interest. Upmeads was formerly a lodge house at the entrance of the drive to Linkwell and Linkwell's former coach house and stable was converted to Heriot Lodge.

Belcare was built around 1780 and is adjacent to Wayside Cottage which was home to the coachman of the Linkwell estate.

Bexhill's first local sub post office was situated in the cottage built at the end of Goddard House, formerly named Genista.

The Firs, now known as Millfield, was the home of Samuel Scrivens, once the second largest landowner in the area.

At the most westerly point of the Old Town is a group of Georgian cottages and on the opposite side of the bypass is the Methodist chapel. Built in 1825, it was the first of Bexhill's non-conformist churches and is now used as a children's nursery school.

In Barrack Road, reached by the underpass, is Chantry Infants School. In 1885, when it was built it was known as St Peter's Girls School and Infants School. Next to it is Bexhill's first police station with its lock-up at the side.

At the end of Barrack Road is a public open space. This was originally the military cemetery belonging to the barracks and at least 150 men of the King's German Legion are buried there.

Until 1962 some of the wooden buildings used by the troops stood in Barrack Road. They served as hospital, recreation room and mess and the oldest part of Barrack Hall was the officers' mess.

In 1967 The Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society was formed with the intention of creating an appreciation for the history, geography and architecture of the area. Much fine work has been achieved over the years in its efforts to preserve the Old Town's special character and the society's booklet *A Walk in Bexhill Old Town* provides an excellent companion when visiting this historic place.

Chantry Lane leaves the Old Town and joins Holliers Hill, which runs on to Sidley. Holliers Hill was the site of Bexhill's first school, St Peter's, which was opened in 1853. It was converted to flats after the second world war. It was also in the area off Holliers Hill, known as the Honies, that some of the first housebuilding took place to this side of the town during the 1880s. Several interesting old houses and cottages can still be seen in Holliers Hill and it is also the route to Bexhill Hospital. The site was purchased in 1928 and the completed hospital opened in 1933. Before this Bexhill had to rely on hospitals in Hastings and Battle.

In 1880 Bexhill suffered a typhoid epidemic and a basic isolation hospital was established in two huts on the open space, The Down. These were later moved to a remote site close to the local cemetery in St Mary's Lane. The accommodation was improved during the first world war but the hospital was closed at the start of the second world war.

Close to the Old Town is Nazareth House, which is a branch of the Roman Catholic organisation of the same name in Hammersmith, run by the Sisters of Nazareth. The first part of this impressive building was opened in 1894.

# MODERN BEXHILL

The commercial centre of Bexhill today provides a well-planned, compact and level shopping area where the majority of shops are small independently run businesses, offering a wide choice of goods and friendly service. There are good restaurants, public houses and eating places to suit all tastes.

It was during the late 1880s, under the considerable influence of the De La Warr family, that Bexhill began its rapid development towards the town we see today and although the modern part of Bexhill lacks the charm of the Old Town, there are some excellent examples of late Victorian and Edwardian architecture and many buildings of interest.

During the mid-1880s building started south of the railway. Among the first streets were Western Road and Cornwall Road, and these were followed by the development around Devonshire Road of the business and shopping centre. The bricks for these projects were made locally and bricks are still made in the area today by the Redland Company at Sidley.

A new railway station was built south of the line in 1891, which fronted Devonshire Square and later the platforms were extended to meet the central station we see today, which was opened in 1902. Also in 1902 the branch line was opened linking Bexhill to the main Hastings to Charing Cross line at Crowhurst. A station was built at Sidley and the Bexhill West station was erected in Terminus Road. The four mile stretch of line ran across the Crowhurst marshes and the massive Crowhurst viaduct. In 1964 the line was closed under the Beeching Plan and the viaduct demolished in 1969.

Today the rail link to London is by the fast frequent service to Victoria, the journey taking approximately 1 hour 40 minutes. An alternative route to the city can be made by changing at St Leonards Warrior Square, from where trains run to Charing Cross. The town is also served by the coastway line to Eastbourne and Brighton to the west and Hastings and Rye to the east. Two further stations serving the Bexhill area are at Collington Halt and Cooden Beach.

An electrically-driven tramway service opened in 1906, running from St Leonards to Bexhill. The fare for the complete journey was threepence. Later that year the service was extended to Cooden in the west and the tram and later trolley bus service continued until 1956, when motor vehicles were introduced. Today the Bexhill Bus Company and the Hastings and District Bus Company serve the area and regular services are available to all parts of the town and further afield.

Opposite the station approach at the corner of Sea Road and Magdalene

Road is the Roman Catholic church of St Mary Magdalene. Building started on the church in 1906 and it was opened the following year. In 1961 a baptistry was added to the church and in 1963 the west porch was added. It was not until 1964 that Mass was celebrated in English for the first time. The town's first war memorial is sited in the church wall beside the pavement. It was unveiled in 1919 and designed by the then Mayor, Alderman Gray.

In Station Road is the house once occupied by television pioneer, John Logie Baird, who lived in Bexhill from 1941 until his death in 1946. A plaque marks the building. The first television pictures to be seen in Bexhill were in 1937 when His Master's Voice Company installed a television receiver in a house in Pear Tree Lane, when pictures were received from Alexandra Palace.

Also in Station Road is the Youth Centre, which was converted from the old Church Army building in 1965.

Southwards down Sea Road the high green domes of the Granville Hotel can be seen. This impressive building was the last major purpose-built hotel to be built in Bexhill during the hotel-building boom at the turn of the century. It was opened in 1905.

The Church of St Barnabas was designed in Gothic style by Sir Arthur Blomfield, architect of the Bank of England. Land was made available for the church by the 7th Earl De La Warr at the corner of Sea Road and Cantelupe Road and the church was built as a legacy of Canon Clarke of St Peter's Church. It was consecrated in 1891 and enlarged in 1909. In Victorian and Edwardian times many distinguished visitors to Bexhill made up the congregations, including the Duke and Duchess of Teck, the parents of Queen Mary on a visit to the town in 1896. The church was slightly damaged in the second world war and the vicarage was destroyed in an air raid in 1942. The site of the vicarage was opened as a public garden in 1965.

In bygone days, before proper defences were built, in rough weather the sea would reach this point in Sea Road.

Along Cantelupe Road can be found the First Church of Christ Scientist and St George's United Reformed Church. Further east are the Police Station and Law Courts.

There are some fine examples of eye-catching architectural craftsmanship in Wilton Road with its wrought iron balconies and intricate brickwork. The more recent Masonic Temple was built in 1931.

The Senior Citizens Club is situated in Eversley Road and the Meeting House of the Society of Friends stands in Albert Road. The first public meeting on Quakerism in the town was given in 1966 by the late Dame Kathleen Lonsdale, the first woman president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

St Leonards Road leads into Devonshire Square, where stands the first new building to be erected south of the railway line. The Devonshire Hotel was built in 1886, and soon became the meeting place of the new Bexhill. It was built by John Webb, and he became the first licensee. It was sold in 1892 and enlarged in 1929. For many years it was the main venue for social functions and meetings, boasting the best dance floor in Bexhill. It was closed as a hotel in 1957 but still continues to function as a popular hostelry.

Next to the Devonshire Hotel is the main post office, which was opened in 1931 by Earl De La Warr. This was also the site of the first Bexhill Fire Station in 1888. The Post Office was partly reconstructed and improved in 1970. Devonshire Square was also the site for the town's first public telephone exchange opened in 1898. It had 33 subscribers and operated from a room on the western side of the square.

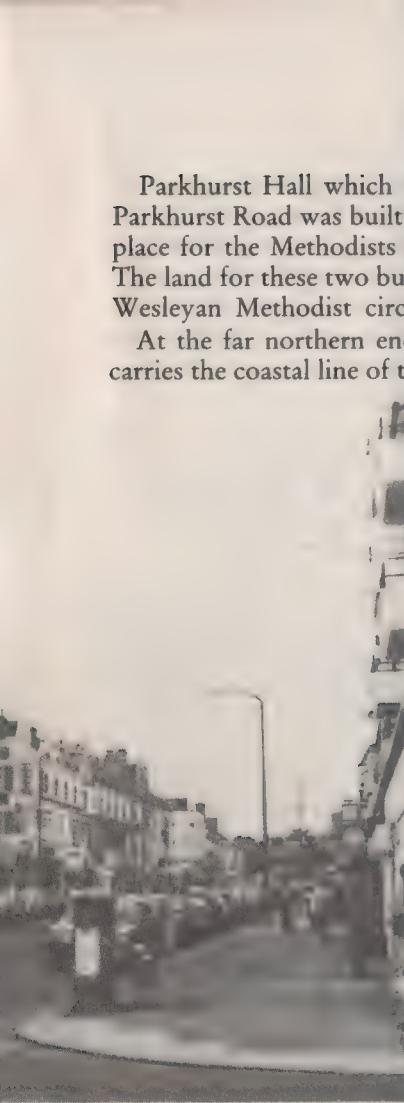
The wide shopping thoroughfare of Devonshire Road was one of the first to be formed in the new part of the town and it quickly became the commercial and banking centre. Bexhill's first bank was founded in 1815 in the High Street of the Old Town and the first bank to open south of the railway was Lloyds in 1892.

Many banks still occupy premises in this elegant street and a lot of the buildings retain their original and impressive frontages. One of the first businesses to open south of the railway line was a chemist, ironically on the site now occupied by the giant multinational, Boots.

Part of the building now occupied by the Regency Arcade, was, in 1897, the printing works of the local newspaper until it was bombed in 1942. Bexhill's first local newspaper appeared in 1887 under the unwieldy title of *The Bexhill-on-Sea Chronicle and Visitors' List, Battle, Pevensey, Sidley and Little Common Advertiser*. In 1896 *The Bexhill-on-Sea Observer and Visitors' Register* made its debut and later in 1930, the two papers merged. Today the town is served by *The Bexhill-on-Sea Observer* with offices in Sackville Road and the free paper *The Bexhill-on-Sea Citizen*.



Devonshire Road



Parkhurst Hall which stands close to the corner of Sackville Road and Parkhurst Road was built in 1892 and was first used as a chapel and meeting place for the Methodists before the adjoining church was erected in 1896. The land for these two buildings was purchased for £250 by the St Leonards Wesleyan Methodist circuit. Additions were made in 1924 and 1961.

At the far northern end of Sackville Road is the Sackville Arch, which carries the coastal line of the railway. This was originally an access point for

cattle to the marshy lowlands from the original village of Bexhill. It was later modernised and widened in 1892 as the town developed south of the railway. In early times, the sea would reach this point. The girders which support the railway over Sackville Arch were cast in the late 1890s by the ironfounder Henry Young, who was responsible for the bronze sphinxes at Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment.

The Public Library is situated in the former St Barnabas school building, which stands at the corner of Sackville Road and Western Road. It was opened in 1951 and extended and modernised in 1966. The building was opened as an infants school in 1893, the upper room first being used as a parish room.

Western Road is a busy shopping street with a good choice of shops and indoor markets. The town's cinema, the Curzon, is situated here.

Turning left from Western Road into Devonshire Square one finds a footbridge spanning the railway. This bridge replaced a subway which was used until 1902.

Across this footbridge is Station Road, which leads into Town Hall Square, with its elegant lamp posts and attractive centrepiece and memorial. The Town Hall was opened in 1895 by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Joseph Renals and an extension added in 1908.

Bexhill's first mayor was Ebenezer Howard, in 1902, and the first woman to represent Bexhill on a public authority was Miss Georgina Egerton, sister-in-law of the 8th Earl De La Warr, in 1894. Mrs C I Meads became Bexhill's first lady mayor in 1930.



*The Castle Hotel.  
The adjoining building  
was once Bexhill's  
first cinema*

Standing in the centrepiece of Town Hall Square is the memorial to Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Lane, described as the 'father of local government'. A great servant of Bexhill, he was the first resident JP and chairman of the Urban Council and later became the town's first county alderman.

The impressive National Westminster Bank building next to the Town Hall was opened in 1898.

On the opposite side of Town Hall Square, at the junction of Station Road, stands one of the oldest established family businesses in Bexhill. The corn and seed merchants, E Warburton & Sons have served the community for over a hundred years. The company started in 1887 at Belle Hill and the present premises have been operational since 1910.

The Castle Hotel was built in 1886 and in its early days was the popular meeting place on the northern side of the railway line.

The rounded building adjoining the Castle was once The Bijou, Bexhill's first cinema. It was later named St George's Cinema. The first talking pictures were shown there in 1929, the first time the phenomenon had been experienced in the area between Brighton and Folkestone. It closed as a cinema in 1954.

In nearby Buckhurst Road the Ritz cinema was opened in 1937 on the site of an old skating rink. It was closed in 1961 and the site is now occupied by British Telecom's telephone exchange.

The Beulah Baptist Church stands close by at the corner of Clifford Road. The church was completed in 1898, but prior to this the adjoining building, now the church hall, was built in 1896 and used for services.

To the west of Town Hall Square is Terminus Road, which was constructed to give access to Bexhill West railway station in 1902 and which led to several independent schools being built in Collington Avenue.

The colourful former Bexhill West station still stands in Terminus Road and is now used as an antiques auction room. The adjoining building, previously the station restaurant, is now a small public house.

The Kingdom Hall of The Jehovah's Witness is also in Terminus Road.

The British Legion (Comrades) Club in London Road (originally named Station Road) was opened in 1922 and named O'Donnell House after the brigadier-general who unveiled the town's war memorial.

Victoria Hall, which stands in Victoria Road, was the first meeting place of the Congregational Church in Bexhill. It was built in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. The hall was also used as a school and for entertainment as well as for services. In 1897, the adjoining church was built. In the 1960s the church was refurbished and later the spire removed, which gives St John's Church an unusual castellated appearance.

Northwards along London Road is the Salvation Army Hall, which was built in 1914.

York Hall once stood in London Road. It adjoined the York Hotel (now The Entertainer public house) and was the most prominent centre for entertainment for many years. It was opened in 1895 and later became the Gaiety Cinema in 1935, but was bombed in 1940 and never re-opened. Lloyd George once spoke there in 1904.

Bexhill Fire and Ambulance Stations are situated close to the cross-roads and Beeching Road leads to one of the town's industrial estates. London Road now crosses the busy A259 through-road and continues on to neighbouring Sidley.

*Wilton Court*



# A STROLL ALONG THE PROM

Bexhill seafront is not commercialised but there are still many places to obtain refreshments and meals along the way. There is ample free car parking and the level promenade is flanked by well-kept lawns and seafront shelters along most of its length.

At the far eastern end is Galley Hill. This area once extended much further seawards and to the east on the foreshore can be seen the remains of trees which once grew along the water's edge.

The sweeping views across the English Channel from Galley Hill are impressive. The Cinque Port of Hastings is five miles to the east and the railway line can be seen as it follows the coastline past the site of the wrecked Dutch East Indiaman, *The Amsterdam*, at nearby Bulverhythe. A diving platform marks the spot just off the seashore. The exposed timbers of *The Amsterdam* can be seen at low autumn and spring tides. The ship ran aground in 1748 and the event caused much excitement to the people of Bexhill at the time. In 1969 contractors working on an outfall pipe used digging equipment to unearth treasures from the wreck. It is now a protected wreck and there has been much talk in recent years of raising the ship and returning it to its native Holland, but to date nothing has materialised.

The modern development of Ravenside Leisure and Recreation Centre, with its pool and shopping facilities, can also be seen to the east. It stands on the site of the former Glyne Gap Gasworks, from where Bexhill's gas was supplied until 1969. Gas was first supplied to the town in 1887 from the Ashdown Road works, also sited at this eastern point of the town. The streets were lit by this means a year later until 1900 when electricity was introduced.

In 1905 a train service was opened between St Leonards and Eastbourne and there was a halt at Glyne Gap.

In the late 1700s a signalling station was established by the Admiralty at Galley Hill and today the Bexhill station of HM Coastguards sits on top of the hill, providing a reminder of the days when this stretch of coast was a haven for smugglers. Galley Hill was a popular landing point.

During the Napoleonic Wars a Martello Tower was erected on Galley Hill and surrounded by a moat. The Galley Hill tower, numbered 44, gradually crumbled into the sea as the cliff fell away at the end of last century.

Today Galley Hill has a fine picnic area and play facilities for children.

To the west can be seen the town of Bexhill with its gently sloping beach and the headland of Beachy Head is in the distance.

Bexhill's beaches have been awarded a certificate of cleanliness and safety and there are now designated dog-free areas. At low tide there are long stretches of firm sand.

Westwards at the foot of Galley Hill is the headquarters of the Bexhill Sea Angling Association. Local organisation of sea angling in Bexhill dates from 1893 and the present club was formed in 1914.

It was between Galley Hill and Sea Road that the first development of what was initially thought would be the centre of the new Bexhill took place, with the building of the sea wall and East Parade in 1883.

Due to the popularity of cycling, a bicycle track and pavilion were added to East Parade in 1896, which was at this time the fashionable promenade.

In 1902 Bexhill was the first town in Britain to host motor racing trials and the event was held along the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile stretch from Galley Hill to De La Warr Parade. There were over 200 competitors for the first event, among them Alfred Harmsworth, a great motoring enthusiast, who later became Lord Northcliffe, founder of the *Daily Mail* newspaper. In 1907 a record of 73 miles an hour was set across the distance. Bexhill continued to be a popular meeting place for motor enthusiasts and motor trials were held at Bexhill until 1925 and plans were once mooted for a race track on the site of the present Cooden golf course.

The impressive Sackville Hotel was one of the first hotels to be erected on the seafront, and when built, stood in isolation. It was originally a row of four dwellings which were later incorporated into a single unit. It was opened as a hotel by Lord De La Warr in July 1890 and was considered to be one of the finest, most fashionable hotels on the south coast. Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, was among the many distinguished visitors and it was the venue for many social functions. During the second world war it was damaged by bombs and was also used by the RAF as a training camp. The Sackville ceased its life as a hotel in the late 1950s, and in 1963 was converted into flats and is now known as the Sackville Village.

The adjacent large seafront property, which stands between Brassey Road and Sea Road, was built by James Gold and completed in 1893.

Dalmore Court at the corner of Devonshire Road and Marina was once the site of the Marine Hotel, which was built in 1895. This had a short life as a hotel as in 1903 it became a holiday home for members of the drapery trade and became known as Roberts Marine Mansions. It remained as such until

bombed in the second world war and demolished as unsafe in 1954. Dalmore Court was erected and opened in 1961. At the Marine Hotel in 1898 a meeting was held which saw the birth of the campaign which led to Bexhill gaining its charter of incorporation, some four years later.

To the west of Sea Road stands the impressive white-towered Wilton Court. Opened in 1900, the building served the town as a hotel for 70 years. It was converted to flats in the 1980s but the original hotel bar still survives in Wilton Road.

Standing on the Parade opposite Sea Road is the town's second war memorial, unveiled in 1920 by Brigadier-General H O'Donnell.

Until 1846, when the railway came to the town, many of its essential materials, including coal, were delivered by boat and unloaded at the point opposite Sea Road, where they were collected by wagons and taken to the Old Town.

Today, the headquarters of the Bexhill Sailing Club stand on the beach. The club was formed in 1947 and the present headquarters was opened in 1965. It was once the site of The Kursaal, a pier-like entertainment centre, built in 1896 by the 8th Earl of De La Warr and opened on Whit Monday 1896 by the Duchess of Teck. For some years the Kursaal remained the town's principal place of entertainment and many famous artistes appeared there. It also at one stage housed a library and in 1898 the first moving pictures were shown, which included scenes of Gladstone's funeral. During the first world war it was renamed The Pavilion, due to the offence caused by the German name and in 1926 the first radio broadcast from Bexhill was made when the BBC transmitted an orchestral concert. The Pavilion was eventually demolished in 1936.

Ornamental gates once stood close to the Kursaal dividing the De La Warr and East Parades from the rest of the sea front. These were demolished in 1913 when the Council took the parades over from the De La Warr estate.

It was from the Kursaal site that plans were put forward to build a pier as an extension to the building but they never materialised. The present roads Channel View East and Channel View West are shown as Pier View East and Pier View West on the projected pier plans. Several earlier proposals to build a pier were put forward in these early days, including one from the West Parade, opposite the clock tower but none developed and Bexhill has never had a pier.

The Marina Arcade was completed around the turn of the century. The centre part was destined to become a swimming pool but again the plan never materialised. Today the Marina Arcade houses amusements, cafes and

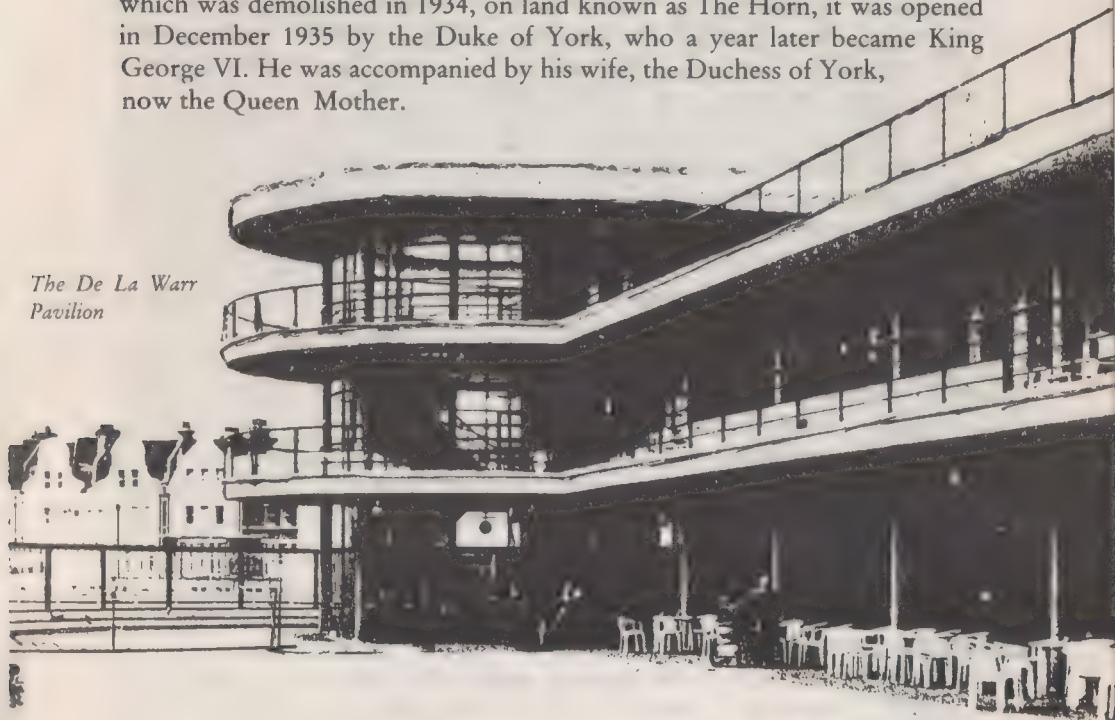
shops and the local branch of the RAF Association. The private Bexhill Club occupies part of the nearby picturesque Marina Court Avenue.

The headquarters of Bexhill Rowing Club are in Central Parade. The club was formed in 1893 and the first local regatta was held that year.

Central Parade was completed in 1910 and effectively linked the previously built West Parade to the East Parade. The majestic white Colonnade with its ornate towers was built to commemorate the coronation of King George V and opened on Coronation Day 1911 by the 1st Earl Brassey. The Colonnade was designed by local architect J B Wall, who was also responsible for many other buildings in the town. The Colonnade had been intended as the first part of a larger entertainments centre. There was a bandstand, now demolished, which was a popular centre for entertainment. It was built on the site of Martello Tower No 46, demolished in 1870.

Inland from the Colonnade stands Bexhill's premier entertainment centre, the De La Warr Pavilion. Built on the site of the former coastguard station, which was demolished in 1934, on land known as The Horn, it was opened in December 1935 by the Duke of York, who a year later became King George VI. He was accompanied by his wife, the Duchess of York, now the Queen Mother.

*The De La Warr Pavilion*



Two hundred and thirty designs for the new entertainment centre had been submitted to the town council in an open competition. The design of German architects Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff was accepted and the De La Warr Pavilion was erected at a cost of £80,000. The building was considered to be ahead of its time and is now a listed building of historical interest. It was recently the subject of a BBC2 documentary. The De La Warr Pavilion houses a theatre, two function suites, bar, restaurant and cafeteria. BBC radio's Friday Night is Music Night, is sometimes staged there and brass bands are a regular feature in the summer on the Sun Terrace. At least two evenings a week there is outdoor dancing.

Part of the area to the east of the De La Warr Pavilion (now the car park) was known as The Religious Lawn, when it was used as a meeting place for Sunday Schools in the early 1900s and was later used as a place of entertainment. Close by was the site of the Marina Court flats and shops, built in 1901 and demolished in 1970 when the car park was extended.

To the west of the De La Warr Pavilion is a putting green. This was once the site of one of Bexhill's grander hotels, The Metropole, built between 1897 and 1900. This lavish hotel suffered a serious fire in 1940 and was bombed the following year. It was finally demolished in 1955.

The West Parade was begun in 1886 by John Webb. Originally this western promenade stood like a causeway above the surrounding marshland.

The promenade was eventually extended to its present length but both the western and original eastern promenades were severely damaged by storms in 1910 and had to be rebuilt with stronger sea walls.

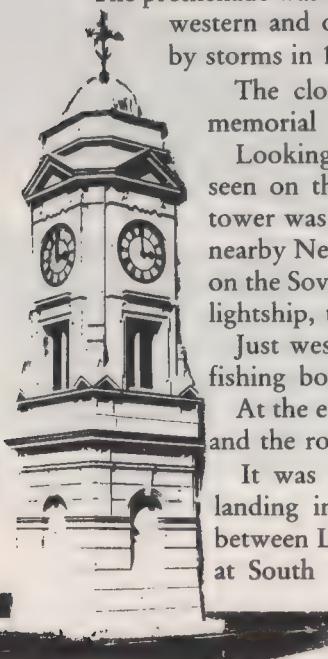
The clock tower standing in the centre of the road is a memorial to King Edward VII.

Looking out to sea, the Royal Sovereign light tower can be seen on the horizon, 11 miles off the coast of Bexhill. This tower was erected in 1971. The structure was manufactured at nearby Newhaven and towed in sections and erected in position on the Sovereign reef. The area had previously been served by a lightship, the first of these boats coming into service in 1875.

Just west of the Sovereign Light Cafe can be seen the local fishing boats where fresh fish can be purchased most days.

At the end of the West Parade the road runs into South Cliff and the roads continue on to neighbouring Cooden.

It was in the area of South Cliff that the first aeroplane landing in Bexhill took place in 1911, when during a race between London and Paris, a French pilot inadvertently landed at South Cliff instead of Brighton.



*The Clock Tower, West Parade*

# PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

For a town of its size Bexhill has a profusion of open recreational spaces within its boundaries.

Pride of place is Egerton Park, acquired in 1901 by the Urban Council from builder and landowner, John Webb and soon landscaped into its present form.

The four acres of waste ground which adjoined the original park were later turned into a park extension which was opened in the summer of 1906 by the Lord Mayor of London. This extension contained an entertainment rendezvous known as the Pergola, which later became the Egerton Park Theatre in 1933 and is now the indoor bowling pavilion.

Egerton Park today contains a boating lake, bowling greens (indoor and out), tennis courts, children's play areas, putting green and many impressive floral displays and is a beautiful place to visit, for activity or relaxation.

In 1903 a shelter was built in the park and used as a concert hall and in 1914 was opened as a museum. Once mainly a natural history museum, the Bexhill Museum has now been totally renovated and offers a broader range of exhibits, among them an impressive painting by L S Lowry. There are regular special exhibitions covering all aspects of local life and children are encouraged to participate in various historical projects and activities during the holiday months.

Until recent years, Egerton Park open air swimming baths adjoined the museum, sea water originally being brought through an iron pipe from the shore. This is now a restful garden area.

To the west of Egerton Park is the 13-acre Polegrove, also acquired from Webb in 1912 and opened as a recreation ground in 1923. This is now the venue for local cricket, rugby and football as well as being an excellent place to relax. Special annual events include Bexhill Horse Show, and the Carnival Fair.

The Broad Oak Park is a popular venue for youngsters, where twice a month the local model society invite them to ride on their miniature trains.

Away from the town centre, adjoining Little Common Road, is The Down, an open area laid out with ridings. The Down was obtained by the local authority in 1897 and was soon laid out to provide a recreational facility for the community.

During the second world war part of The Down was used as allotments in the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

The hall of the Territorial Army, which has had a long association with Bexhill, stands on the eastern edge of The Down and was opened in 1915. Nearby is part of The Down School, which stands on the site of the 18th century workhouse, the area long afterwards referred to as Workhouse Field. This part of the school was opened in 1902.

On the wall of The Good Shepherd Church, in London Road, is an unusual stone inscription, dedicating the wall to the services of Margaret Scrivens, a member of the wealthy Bexhill family, who assisted the poor mothers of the neighbourhood and Sidley. The wall was erected in 1913 and the dedication made by her sister Ann.

It was at the foot of The Down that the search for coal took place in the early 1800s, when it was believed large stocks were available in the area. However, this proved a costly misjudgement and after several unsuccessful borings, carried out at great expense, all hopes of finding coal were abandoned. A second working close to the present Ashdown Road was eventually covered in when the railway came in 1846.

Today The Down has football and cricket pitches and is a pleasant place for a walk. The Sports Centre in Little Common Road was completed in 1940, on the site of a former mission hall and has catered for many sporting enthusiasts over the years.

In nearby Eastwood Road is the Hamilton Hall Evangelical Church. It has had premises here since 1898, the present building being erected in 1957.

To the north of The Down is St Stephen's Church, consecrated in 1900. The original design included a spire but it was never actually built. The bell in the tower first tolled on the occasion of Queen Victoria's death in 1901. The bell was later replaced by electronic peals.

Windmills were once a feature of the high ground surrounding Bexhill and the mill in the nearby Glenleigh Park area, erected in 1735, continued working till 1928. In 1956 it was damaged by a storm and finally collapsed in 1965. The brick roundels are all that remain today.



# SPORTING BEXHILL

Bexhill has a fine sporting tradition and most sports are represented.

The Ravenside Leisure Centre at the eastern end of De La Warr Road has a leisure pool and ten pin bowling and the more recent venture at the foot of The Down provides further indoor facilities.

*The Daily Telegraph* once described the town as the golfing centre of the south and the sport is certainly among the most popular pastimes in Bexhill. There are two excellent local courses at Cooden Beach and Highwoods and another 10 or so within easy distance.

There are bowling greens at Egerton Park, the Polegrove, Buxton Drive in Sidley and at the private Gullivers Club. Highlight of the year is the Bexhill Open Tournament. Indoor bowls can be played in Egerton Park Bowls Pavilion.

Bexhill has a host of facilities for the sailing fraternity and the annual regatta in July is always a popular event.

Tennis can be played on the public courts at Egerton Park and Little Common and there is a private club at Cooden Beach.

Bexhill Town, Sidley United and Little Common are the leading football teams in the area and play in the Sussex County League, while Hastings and Bexhill Rugby Club holds regular matches at the Polegrove.

Sidley and Bexhill represent the town at cricket in the Sussex League.

Sea angling is a popular pastime in the town, the local club having premises at the eastern end of the promenade.

Facilities for badminton and squash are also available.

Outstanding occasions from Bexhill's sporting past include the cricket match played against the Australian Test XI in 1896 on the former Manor House ground, Bexhill Town's charity football match against the famous Arsenal side in 1948 and the appearance of famous Wimbledon champion Helen Wills Moody, who once played an exhibition game at Cooden.

Cooden Beach Golf course was completed in 1912 under the instructions of the 8th Earl De La Warr and facilitated the making up of Cooden Drive, in 1914, so giving the town a prestigious sporting venue and extending the town to the west. In 1924 the English Ladies championship was held there and in 1927, the club's first professional, Fred Robson, finished runner up in the British Open, and went on to coach the British team which won the Walker Cup from the United States for the first time.

The Highwoods Club, laid out by J H Taylor, was opened in 1925.

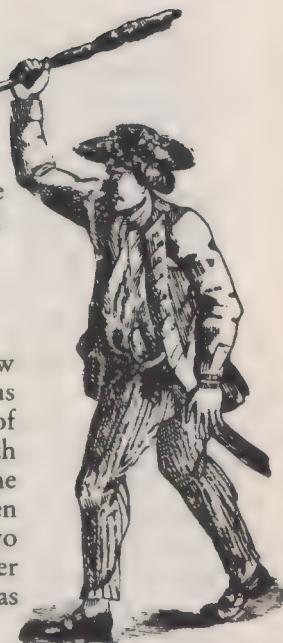
# ENVIRONS

## *Sidley*

Sidley, which is reached from Bexhill by following London Road out of the town, was formerly an isolated hamlet, on the road from Bulverhythe to Ninfield, surrounded by farms and it was not until the late 19th century that building extended from Bexhill and the two places began to merge.

In the 15th century a forge was in use serving the iron industry. It was finally closed in the 1950s.

Sidley Green is dominated by the 500-year-old New Inn public house and it was on this green the infamous Battle of Sidley Green took place in 1828, when men of the Coastal Blockade ended a running battle with smugglers they had first confronted at Galley Hill. The fight continued to Cramp's Farm, which lay between Sidley and Bexhill and one Blockade man and two smugglers were killed. Eight smugglers were later sentenced to death at the Old Bailey but this was commuted to transportation to New South Wales.



There were once three windmills in the Sidley area but none remain today. Pankhurst's Mill was bought by a windmill enthusiast in 1928 for £25, dismantled and re-erected at Leigh in Kent at a cost of £1500.

Sidley's chief expansion came with the Bexhill West to Crowhurst railway line in 1902, when a station was built at the southern approach. The line was closed in 1964 and the station later demolished. The site is now occupied by a petrol filling station.

Reminders of the days of the railway can be found by looking over the bridge at the entrance to Sidley. The path of the rail line can still be seen and close by the station site is Old Station House, a private residence, which was once the stationmaster's house.

The Pelham Hotel stands opposite the station site and was built at the time the railway came, and apart from providing accommodation served the area for the stabling of horses. At the same time the Sussex beerhouse, now the Sussex Hotel, opposite the New Inn was rebuilt to appear as it does today.

Sidley continued to grow and was the venue for the first municipal housing within the Bexhill boundaries when Buxton Drive was developed after the first world war.

The first All Saints Church comprised only the nave and was dedicated in 1910. The enlarged church with tower and chancel was consecrated in 1930.

During the 1960s more shops were opened and today Sidley retains its independency and has maintained its community spirit.

The road leaves Sidley at the northern end and the right hand fork leads to the nearby villages of Ninfield, Catsfield and Hooe.

## *Little Common*

Little Common is situated to the west of Bexhill and is reached via the A259, which passes the Denbigh Hotel, standing high on the bend.

Grouped on a roundabout, the pleasant village of Little Common reached its present size during the 1960s when many of the modern shops were added to cater for the growing community.

The area was once surrounded by farmland. A forge producing wrought iron was in operation close by as long ago as the 14th century and a later forge was used in the village to serve the farms and was working until after the first world war. The water needed was drawn from a village pond.

Little Common once had its own gang of smugglers, who worked the nearby coastline. The smugglers owned two boats and kept records of their activities. They met their match in 1822 when captured by Customs men.

St Mark's Church was built in 1842 from material salvaged from the demolition of Martello Tower No 42 which stood at Bulverhythe. It was brought by sea to the bottom of Cooden Sea Road and transported by cart to the church site. Three years later during the building of the chancel of St Mark's, material was utilised from Martello Tower No 48 on South Cliff.

Little Common had a small barracks for a detachment of the King's German Legion during the Napoleonic Wars.

The recreation ground was first laid out in 1926. Cricket, tennis and Sussex County League football are now played there.

The Wheatsheaf public house was rebuilt in 1886.

Further to the west along the A259 is the area known as Northeye, once a small port and a limb of the Cinque Port of Hastings, when the sea encroached further inland. A chapel, demolished in 1857, once stood at Northeye and is believed to have been the second church to be named in the Domesday Book after St Peter's.

Today the area is known for its prison. HM Prison Northeye was opened in 1967 on the former site of RAF Wartling. The RAF station was operational between 1941 and 1944 and was responsible for destroying many flying bombs, during the war. After the war the station was used as a transit camp until 1964.

## *Cooden*

The area known as Cooden lies to the west of Bexhill and dates back to Norman times when the manor was granted to John de Coding by Count Robert of Eu, Lord of the Rape of Hastings.

At one time it was considered an important port and a vital link in the defence of the south coast at the time of the threat from the Spanish Armada.

During the Napoleonic Wars a Martello Tower stood at Cooden and in 1860 was demolished as target practice in an Army artillery demonstration.

The manor eventually passed to the Sackville family and later to the De La Warr family and at the close of the Edwardian era the 8th Earl De La Warr turned his attention to the development of Cooden. In 1906 Cooden was still open country and the only road was a lane from Little Common.

It was the opening of the Cooden Beach Golf course in 1912 which did most to bring Cooden into the fold of neighbouring Bexhill. Apart from the advantage of Bexhill gaining a prestigious new facility, it led to the making up of Cooden Drive in 1914. In between the two world wars roads stemmed directly from this road and residential building was completed in the area after the second world war.

The Cooden Beach Hotel opened in 1931, three shops being converted for the purpose. The largest barn in the district once stood on the site. Famous visitors to Cooden Beach Hotel were King George V and Queen Mary and the Duke and Duchess of York (afterwards King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, now the Queen Mother). Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald stayed there while on a golfing holiday.

Today Cooden is largely residential but has the attraction of the golf course and is a popular spot for bathing and sailing. The area is served by Cooden Beach railway station as well as a regular bus service.

Further to the west is Normans Bay, with its surviving Martello Tower and Pevensey, the landing place of the Normans. The coastal road sweeps inland to pass the Star Inn, a former smugglers' haunt, at Normans Bay.

## *Outskirts*

For those wishing to travel further afield, Bexhill is surrounded by accessible open countryside with many places of interest. To the east is Hastings, essential to the 1066 story; picturesque Rye with its cobbled streets and old buildings; and the ancient town of Winchelsea. To the west Pevensey, the landing place of William the Conqueror and Eastbourne with its many attractions. Inland the charming villages of Burwash, with Batemans, home of Rudyard Kipling; Bodiam, with its moated castle; Northiam, with the 15th century house Great Dixter; Battle, with its abbey and ancient church. Just a few of the many places within easy reach.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Population: Approx 35,000

Main Post Office:  
Devonshire Square

Information Centre:  
De La Warr Pavilion

Local Newspapers:  
Bexhill-on-Sea Observer;  
Bexhill Citizen; Evening Argus

Cinema: Curzon, Western Rd

Theatre:  
De La Warr Pavilion.

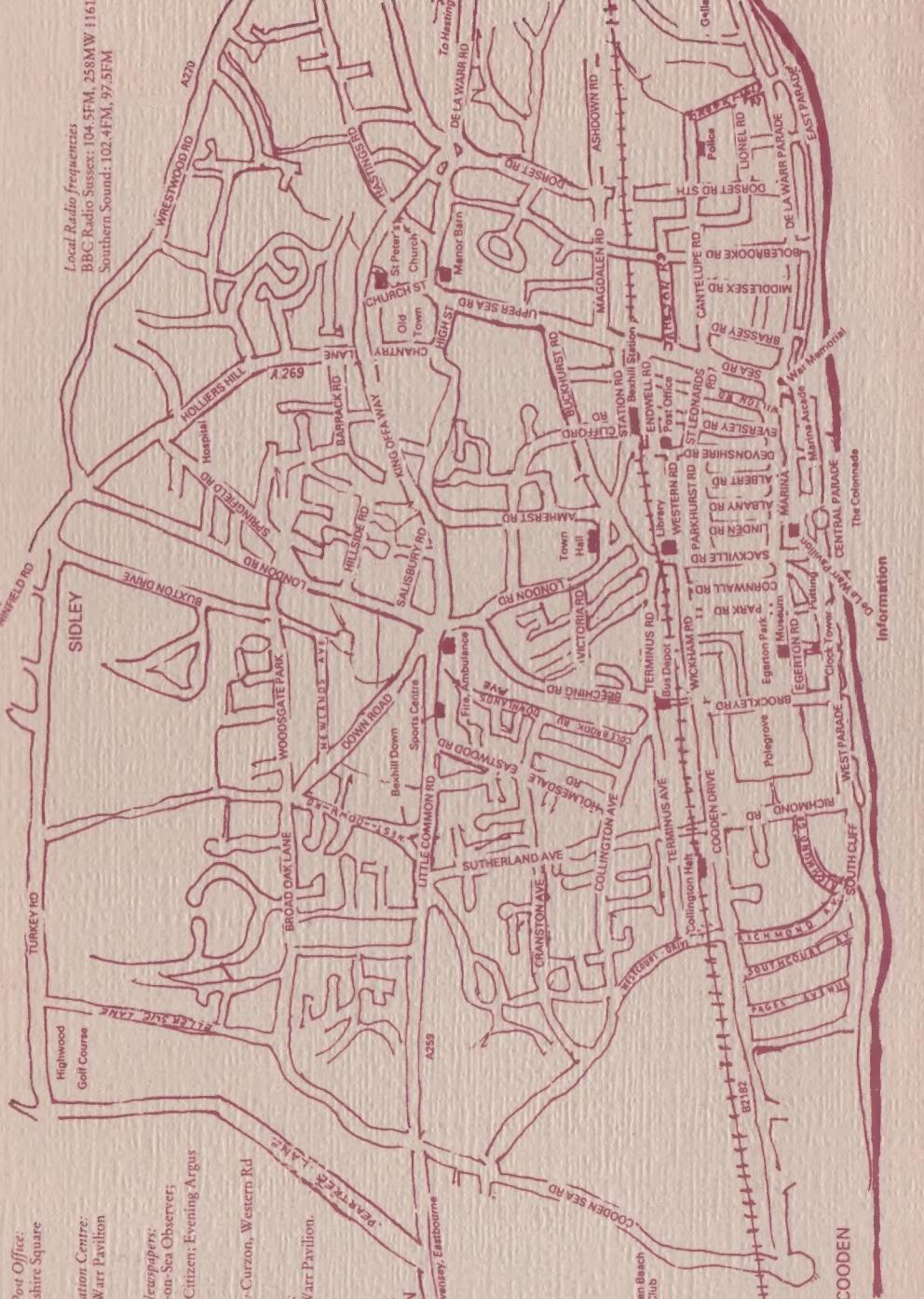
De La Warr Pavilion;  
Eastbourne;

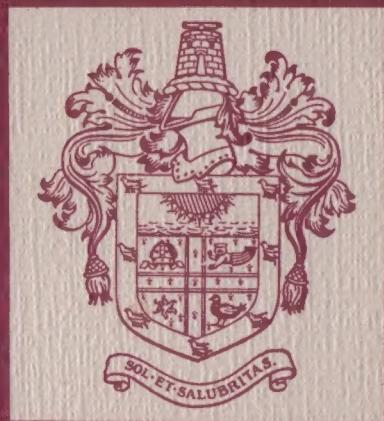
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